

Texas Education Review

Introduction to Volume 4, Issue 1: A Highlight on Special Education Educators

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The absence or marginalization of special education issues from the broader discourse on teachers and teaching has been an outcry of many special educator researchers and practitioners. To address these gaps, this issue of *Texas Education Review* centers on special education educators to highlight persistent and emerging challenges and policies of special education teaching, preparation, and evaluation. The issue begins with a brief overview on the preparation of 21st century special educators. Here, Jessica Faith Carter presents the challenges and opportunities of special educator preparation and certification by contextualizing the history of the field and outlining key policies and shifts in special education, particularly as schools become more culturally and linguistically diverse and more technologically advanced. Expanding on this theme, Raymond Ostendorf's article, "Special Education Teacher Educator Values," encourages special education teacher educators' to analyze paradigms for practice and to scrutinize the implications of the various models of disability, in order to expose their students to the multiple approaches to teaching special education students. In "Training Special Educators in a World of Technology Changes," Nigel Pierce proposes reaching a diverse body of learners from a different frame: the introduction of advanced technology into the classroom. To ensure teachers' successful facility with implementing technology, he advocates for stronger technological competence in teacher education institutions, urging them to keep pace with changes in technology, offer more courses focused on technology, and mirror the ways state and local education agencies meet the needs of special education students using digital technology.

While *Part I* of the issue focuses on professional growth via teacher preparation, *Part II* does so through an examination of teacher evaluation systems. Gavin Watts' backgrounder opens the second part of this issue. In it, he provides a brief history of teacher evaluations and presents several key issues in evaluating special educators, especially as the country embraces one-size-fits-all, market-based, value added evaluation tools. Following this piece, Hayes and Holdheide's editorial, "Leveraging Educator Evaluation Systems to Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities," lays the groundwork for the rest of the issue, discussing how initiatives within the newly passed *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) create a timely and powerful opportunity to address critical issues that have plagued the field of special education for decades. Next, Sledge and Pazey highlight teachers' experiences' in "Teacher Evaluation in the Special Education Setting: Voices from the Field." This qualitative, multi-case, research study provides insight into the perceptions and experiences of special education teachers and administrators in their attempt to advance professional growth and teacher effectiveness through the use of evaluations. In the final piece, Johnson, Crawford, Moylan, and Ford offer a solution to uniform teacher evaluation protocols and instruments by proposing an alternative. In "Issues in Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Challenges and Current Perspectives", they examine issues related to the content of special education teacher observation, processes for evaluation, as well as the evaluation feedback to support instructional change.

While there are many more concerns and possibilities for growth left unsaid, this issue of *Texas Education Review* firmly situates special education educators to policy reforms, discourses on the professionalization of teaching, as well as the imperative that schools be equitable and democratic to advance academic and life outcomes for students with disabilities.